

BELLEVUE NETWORK ON AGING
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

May 7, 2009
8:30 a.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E -120

MEMBERS PRESENT: Lynne Robinson, Eileen Rasnack, Berta Seltzer, Dwayne Dilley, Diana Thompson, Howard Katz, Gary Dickerman, Bob Megargel, Heidi Ressler, Hannah Kimball, Bill Merriman, Marjorie Todd, Jullie Gray

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Cathy VonWald, Department of Parks and Community Services

OTHERS PRESENT: Jerry Johnson, Bellevue Police Department; Jim Hershey, Bellevue Police Department; Page Ulrey, King County Prosecutor's Office; Nadia Fiorini, Seattle Police Department; Kathy Iverson, Kirkland Senior Council; Jerry Halvorson; David Plummer

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. WELCOME AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 8:35 a.m. by Chair Robinson who presided. All committee members were present.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. April 2, 2009

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Ms. Seltzer. Second was by Mr. Dickerman and the motion carried unanimously.

3. PRESENTATION: ELDER ABUSE

Ms. VonWald introduced Detective Jerry Johnson with the Bellevue Police Department, Page Ulrey from the King County Prosecutor's Office, and Nadia Fiorini from the Seattle Police Department.

Ms. Ulrey said there are a lot of different definitions of elder abuse. The one most commonly used is physical, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation of an older person. The victims are typically over 60, predominantly female, and cut across racial, gender and socioeconomic lines. It is very difficult to get a handle on the prevalence of elder abuse, but the best research suggests that anywhere from one to two million Americans 55 or over have been harmed by a caretaker in either a nursing home setting or in their own home. There are about nine million elderly Americans living alone in their homes, and of those two million say they have no one to turn to when they need help.

Ms. Ulrey said elder abuse is profoundly harmful to the victims, even in cases of financial exploitation. One study suggests that even mild abuse or financial exploitation of the elderly increases premature death by 300 percent.

Incidents of elder abuse are on the rise nationally and locally. The elderly is the fastest growing age group, and the older one gets the more likely it is one will have some form of dementia. Dementia makes people perfect victims for abuse because they often cannot remember what happened and will not report the abuse. Homecare is a growing industry, and homecare workers are subject to only minimal background checks; in Washington state homecare workers have a statewide criminal history check run on them. They are not paid well and they often face high temptation/low-risk circumstances.

The population of people 85 and older is the fastest growing age group in the nation; the population is forecast to increase more than 400 percent by 2050. The 65-84 age group is expected to grow by 80 percent by 2030.

Ms. Fiorini said there are a lot of different dynamics in play in domestic violence cases. The victims are often reluctant to cooperate for fear of retaliation, there may be financial matters involved, and there may be child custody situations. The dynamics involved in elder abuse are often the same but even more complicated, making it difficult for elders to report abuse. Most of the time the perpetrator is a family member, usually an adult son or daughter in their 50s, or grandchildren upon whom the elder is dependent to some degree for their own independence. Many feel if they report incidents of abuse they will lose their own freedoms.

Mr. Dickerman asked what percentage of elder abuse cases involve family members versus strangers. Ms. Fiorini said in the majority of cases she has investigated the abuse was committed by a family member or a live-in caregiver. There is, however, a lot of abuse that takes place in skilled nursing facilities.

Ms. Ulrey said there is much in the news about scams that target the elderly, but the fact is the elderly are most at risk by the people they love.

Det. Johnson said a recent case in Bellevue involved a woman about 78 years old who lived with a caregiver who was not a family member. There were allegations of hair pulling and slapping by the caregiver, but the victim believed the incidents were all her fault. The victim feared losing her caregiver and his attentions and cooking, and feared having to live somewhere else. Her family members were irate over the incidents of abuse, but the victim claimed she was still able to make her own decisions.

Ms. Ulrey agreed that elder abuse cases are difficult for a variety of reasons. The victims often do not want the process to move forward through the legal system. Often the abuser is the person keeping the victim from ending up in a nursing home, and many victims believe putting up with some abuse is preferable to being placed in a nursing home and losing their freedoms.

Ms. Fiorini said in a high number of elder abuse cases the abuser is addicted to drugs or alcohol, and many are otherwise unemployed. They see the elder persons steady retirement incomes, and while those income streams may not be much they are often more than what the abuser has. In some instances there are elderly persons living with family members who have mental health issues, which should always be a red flag.

Ms. Fiorini shared with the Network an incident of domestic violence involving spouses who were both in their 80s. She noted that in about 13 percent of elder abuse cases, the perpetrator

is a spouse. For some, the pattern of violence has carried throughout the marriage, while for others it begins as the partners age.

Ms. Ulrey said elder sexual assault is more common than anyone would like to think about. Eighteen percent of rape victims and one in seven sexual assault murder victims are 60 or older. Rape is particularly devastating to elderly victims. Very often the perpetrators are caregivers, the majority of which are family members, an adult son or a spouse. Usually the female victims have health issues that make it difficult for them to function on their own. Elder sexual assault cases are largely underreported, and when they are reported building a prosecutable case is often very difficult.

Mr. Dilley asked what the sons and daughters of elderly parents can do to prevent elder abuse in all its forms. Ms. Ulrey said in nearly every case loneliness is a huge factor. Trying to prevent isolation and keeping elderly parents involved and active are key ingredients to providing protections. Staying in touch is important as well, and when there are issues of capacity with regard to finances, a professional should be hired to take over those functions if an adult child does not want the responsibility. There is a national organization focused on preventing elder abuse, but unlike child abuse and domestic violence there is not a lot of money being put toward the issue; more money and more public awareness is needed. There is a bill that has been before Congress since 2001 called the Elder Justice Act that would really improve funding for adult protective services and public awareness; the bill has been presented many times but has always died.

Chair Robinson said she is associated with a large adult care facility. One of the things the facility staff are constantly reminding the adult children of is the fact that their parents are independent and sexual people, even those with dementia, and that they have the right to have those kinds of relationships. She asked how those in adult care facilities, or the children of parents who are in adult care facilities, can prevent situations of abuse. Ms. Ulrey said it all comes down to better education and communication, as well as counseling for the residents, to make certain the relationships the elderly are in are safe.

Answering a question asked by Ms. Thompson, Ms. Ulrey said the annual domestic violence conference sponsored by the King County Prosecutor's Office is scheduled for October 19 and 20 at the Meydenbauer Center. She invited the Network members to attend.

Det. Johnson said Bellevue does not have a large list of adult abuse cases to deal with. He said the cases that have come up in the city, however, have led him to consider how he will deal with his parents on different issues. He said he does not want to act like a policeman but does feel the need to insert himself into their lives while respecting their right to make their own decisions. He said adult children should not be afraid of hurting an older parent's feelings by asking specific questions, pointing out issues of concern, or simply putting a stop to questionable things.

Ms. Fiorini said the perfect victims are those who do not have anyone in their lives to bounce things off of or to share with.

With regard to elder financial exploitation, Ms. Ulrey said the majority of cases involve known perpetrators rather than strangers. The most common instance of financial abuse is theft by power of attorney in which the elder person has knowingly given someone the authority to act on their behalf. Rather than acting in a way that would benefit the elderly person, the perpetrators use the authority to benefit themselves.

Mr. Katz noted that he was the victim of identity theft involving his ATM card and asked how those crimes are committed. Det. Jim Vershey with the Bellevue Police Department said the

thieves often attach skimming devices to ATM machines that read the numbers off the cards; as the PIN numbers are entered, they are automatically downloaded to a computer. The scams are repeated nationwide and locally, and banks lose a great deal of money every day as a result.

Ms. Ulrey said most of the cases she prosecutes involves elder neglect by a caretaker charged with taking care of someone who cannot take care of themselves. She shared the specifics of cases that occurred in Bellevue. The best prevention is for a responsible party to keep in regular contact.

Chair Robinson said in her professional life as a home caregiver she sees a great deal of financial abuse going on but has found it very difficult to report. She said she just recently was involved with a family who moved their dependent mother to an adult care facility without her permission so that they could live in the house on the water with the panoramic view. Adult Protective Services was contacted but indicated that they could not act until the elderly woman was actually moved and until the women verbalized that she did not want to move and wants to go back to her home. One of the children threatened that if they had to put her back in her own home they would never contact her again. Ms. Ulrey said she would be happy to follow up on that case. She pointed out that homecare workers, healthcare providers, EMTs and law enforcement officers are all required by law to report cases of suspected elder abuse to the proper authorities. Anyone can submit reports, even if they are not part of a mandatory reporter classification.

Det. Johnson provided the group with a printout of statistics involving Bellevue victims age 65 and older for the years 2007, 2008 and the first quarter of 2009.

Kirkland Senior Council Kathy Iverson asked if there would be any value in pushing for community education in terms of mandatory reporting for everyone. Ms. Ulrey suggested there would be tremendous value in taking that approach. Of primary importance is the need to educate the public about what elder abuse is and what to do about it. She allowed that many who are in the mandatory reporters classification are not fully educated with regard to their reporting obligations. The fact is most EMTs do not even know they are mandated to report instances of suspected elder abuse.

Answering a question asked by Ms. Thompson, Ms. VonWald said the King County Long-term Care Ombudsman program has been around for some time and is quite effective as an organization. The volunteer ombudsmen work as advocates for residents of adult care facilities.

Det. Hershey said it is not always about who is mandated to report and more about simply reporting what is observed. A few months ago a clerk at a Wal-Mart in Whatcom County noticed a number of people coming in to get money orders which were then wired to Canada. The clerk did not know that a scam was being perpetrated, but suspected something was wrong and reported it. In Bellevue, an elderly man visited his bank and sought to take out \$118,000 from his account. The teller thought something did not appear to be right, did not honor the request, and filed a report. The investigation found that the elderly man was wiring money to a scam artist in Tennessee.

Det. Hershey said everyone should get to know their neighbors. He shared with the Network the case of a woman and her daughter who lived in an apartment complex in West Bellevue. The elderly woman was in her upper 80s and the daughter was in her 60s. The daughter passed away. None of the neighbors even knew who lived in the apartment. Nothing was even reported about a bad odor coming from the apartment. It was not until about a month later that someone filed a report. When the police investigated they found the elderly mother

deceased, but there was so much clutter in the apartment that the dead daughter's body was not found until a week later. The story would have ended up very differently had a neighbor simply been aware of who lived next door and paid attention to who was or was not coming and going.

BREAK

4. BNOA Maintenance

A. PR/Outreach

Chair Robinson thanked Mr. Dickerman for accepting on behalf of the Network the Older Americans Month proclamation handed down by the City Council on May 4.

Chair Robinson noted that at the same Council meeting Ms. VonWald gave a presentation outlining the Network's workplan for 2009. Ms. VonWald said the Council recognized and expressed appreciation for the work done by the Network. Several Network members were present.

The Network was reminded that presentations will be made soon to the Parks Board and the Human Services Commission regarding the work of the Network. Chair Robinson said Mr. Dickerman will make the Parks Board presentation on May 12, and that she would be making the presentation to the Human Services Commission on June 2.

B. Regional Partnerships

Ms. VonWald reported that the joint committee, which is comprised of two Network members and two Kirkland Senior Council members, has met twice. The work plan they have developed is focused on advocacy on the state and local levels in terms of funding for older adults. They are looking at bringing to a joint Network and Kirkland Senior Council meeting the training video that was developed by Kirkland in 2005.

The joint committee is encouraging everyone to attend the Senior Lobby Conference on October 30. The committee is also looking at organizing a legislative meet and greet event in November prior to the legislative session. It was also suggested that on the local level both groups should develop a list of questions to ask candidates for city and county offices given that 2009 is an election year.

Ms. VonWald reported that the King County Council staff have slated a meeting to go over the Human Services Committee work program and discuss the impacts that could result from the recent budget cuts. She encouraged Network members to attend the meeting, but added that she would try to get the meeting minutes for the Network to review. She said she would email the particulars to the Network members.

C. Legislative Issues

Ms. Rasnack reported that the letter sent from the Network to local representatives has had a very positive impact on the Volunteer Chore Services program, which has been put back in the budget.

Ms. Rasnack said the Housing Trust Fund is currently in the budget for \$100 million for the next biennium, which is a cut of 50 percent. Efforts to advocate for increasing the allocation are continuing.

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Advocacy/Housing & Mobility

Mr. Dickerman provided the Network with copies of the annual report for the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative. He noted that the mobility coordinator position is set to be filled in July; the full-time person will actively help the program by administering it, by being active in the community, and by actively seeking outside funding.

Ms. VonWald added that the collaborative is a joint venture that was started a few years ago to identify the needs and gaps in transportation options for older adults and persons with disabilities. The group conducted a survey to determine the needs and gaps, and has done an excellent job of getting grant funding, all of which has been funneled to Hopelink to administer. Hopelink will be the organization that hires the mobility coordinator.

Mr. Katz noted that two persons expressed opposition to the proposed alignment through the Bel-Red corridor at the City Council hearing on light rail. He said he is also opposed to the NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street alignment as proposed. He asked if Network should take a stand on the issue. Ms. VonWald said the Network will be receiving an update regarding the Bel-Red corridor project at the June meeting. The presenting staff will be able to point out how the Network can have the most impact.

Ms. VonWald said the committee talked about the need for a housing update from ARCH director Arthur Sullivan. She said she learned from talking to Mr. Sullivan that Aging and Disability Services commissioned a King County housing report in 2008; that report was just recently released and is available online. Mr. Sullivan suggested that in order to get the bigger picture, the Network should hear directly from both the housing study people and himself. Accordingly, a meeting has been scheduled for May 21 to talk about how to best roll out the King County housing report.

Chair Robinson asked if there is a full list of affordable senior housing in Bellevue. Ms. VonWald said ARCH has that list and it is available online. She added that she could make a hard copy of the list available to all Network members.

B. Research/Needs Assessment

Ms. Rasnack reported that the needs assessment work is rapidly wrapping up. She thanked everyone who participated in the community conversations. The work to compile the data collected is under way.

It was agreed that the work of the Research/Needs Assessment committee was completed.

C. Education/Safety & Support

Ms. Thompson said the column for the *Bellevue Reporter* is still in process. Ms. Ressler explained that the thinking was the piece should be an ongoing segment with tips, sponsored by the Network. She said State Farm Insurance has stepped up wanting to be a sponsor partner as well.

Ms. VonWald pointed out that what the Network approved was having an article written and run in the *Bellevue Reporter*. She suggested that to take another tack would require re-approval by the Network.

Ms. Ressler said she could understand the *Bellevue Reporter* not wanting to run a regular article for free. The sponsorship of State Farm means the paper could be paid for running the tips column. There are still details to be worked out.

Mr. Dilley suggested that if a reporter from the *Bellevue Reporter* had been invited to see the presentation on elder abuse, they would have been drawn to give the Network a great deal of credibility, which would have resulted in at least one article appearing in the newspaper. Whenever a top-notch presentation is planned, reporters should be invited to attend.

Ms. Rasnack proposed having the Network regularly submit articles and tips columns to the city's *Neighborhood News* publication as well.

Ms. Thompson said the committee is in the process of finalizing a full article to be submitted to the *Bellevue Reporter* in line with what the Network previously approved.

Ms. Thompson said the committee is also in the process of developing a bookmark.

Mr. Megargel said he has been working with Lori Taylor who runs the Farmers Market, which is set to be moved to the old Safeway parking lot across from Bellevue Square. Ms. Taylor is open to coordinating with the Network to have a presence at the market focusing on elder education and safety.

It was agreed that the subcommittee should continue to work out the details.

Ms. VonWald reported that the elder abuse video produced by Kirkland is running on BTV Tuesdays at noon, 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. The Gatekeeper production has not yet been given a slot.

6. STAFF REPORT

Ms. VonWald made available to the Network the booklet for the Northwest Senior Games showing all of the various sports. She noted that Bellevue will be hosting fencing and kayaking, and pointed out that the city's Aging Services had a full-page ad in the booklet. She said she will be attending the events and will hand out Network materials.

Ms. VonWald announced that the North Bellevue Community Center received a Best of Bellevue award from the *Bellevue Reporter*.

7. NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Dickerman proposed that an action committee should be formed to help in promoting elder abuse prevention.

Commissioner Seltzer said during the break she spoke briefly with Ms. Ulrey who seemed to think that some sort of organization should be started, possibly independent of the Network but with full Network support. The group should start with an awareness focus and then move on to other things.

Ms. VonWald suggested the Education/Safety & Support committee would be the logical group to take up the issue.

8. PUBLIC COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

9. UPCOMING AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. VonWald reviewed with the Network the items slated for upcoming meetings.

10. ADJOURN

Chair Robinson adjourned the meeting at 10:35 a.m.